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Report of the Acting Executive Director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research*

* The present document is part I of the report of the Acting Executive Director of UNITAR. The final report will be issued subsequently as Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 14 (A/51/14/Rev.1).

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I. SUMMARY

1. The present report covers the period 1 July 1994 to 30 June 1996. During the period under review, 132 different training programmes and two distance-learning courses were organized in the five continents, benefiting 7,265 participants. Moreover, during this time, the restructuring process of UNITAR, decided by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/227 of 8 April 1993, has been completed and steps have been taken for the implementation of the remaining decision of the General Assembly: namely the opening of the Liaison Office in New York, in September 1996, have been taken.

2. To reflect the resulting restructured Institute, the format of the report of the Executive Director has, as of this year, been changed. It aims at being more to the point, and less bureaucratic and repetitive than in the past. The operational priorities, the streamlining of the programmes and the improvement of the UNITAR administrative management should become readily apparent. A short summary gives an immediate overview of the objectives, substance and implementation of each programme. It is followed by a more comprehensive description of activities.

3. United Nations General Assembly action: By resolutions 49/125 of 19 December 1994 and 50/121 of 20 December 1995, the General Assembly recognized the successful implementation of the transfer of the headquarters of UNITAR from New York to Geneva and took note with interest of the measures taken to complete the restructuring process of the Institute. It recognized that training activities should play a more visible and broader role in the programmes of the United Nations and reaffirmed the relevance of UNITAR's tasks and mandate. It furthermore invited the Institute to intensify collaboration with funds and programmes of the United Nations and strengthen cooperation with qualified national and international institutions, including the United Nations University and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Training Centre at Turin. It also suggested that measures should be taken for the regularization of the position of the Executive Director, and proposed solutions to the issue of rental costs for UNITAR.

4. As it has done since the start of the restructuring process, the Board of Trustees of UNITAR continues to hold two annual sessions, to formulate and monitor policies consistent with the decisions of the General Assembly. The Board has indicated that, in view of the positive feedback received regarding UNITAR activities, improved dissemination of information was necessary to further strengthen the credibility of the Institute, which could in turn lead to a more effective mobilization of financial and political support. In particular, the Board discussed the successful conduct of some recent training activities, particularly those relating to the areas of international law, preventive diplomacy, environmental conventions, and financial management. The Board encouraged continued attention to the mix of issues embraced by UNITAR with more focus on "developmental" concerns, and considered that the Institute could better capitalize on its multi-disciplinary approach, which had allowed it to go beyond a traditional, linear development of curricula and training material. At the present juncture, the Board has initiated reflection on ways to guarantee the autonomy of UNITAR and to further analyse possible options for the future in identifying additional priorities in the area of training, thereby ensuring that UNITAR continues to improve its response to the needs and expectations of the Organization and its Member States.

5. The diverse nature of the work conducted by UNITAR is due, in large part, to its institutional mandate and to its bridging position between policy and academic circles. The Institute provides different types of training: skills-building, policy-setting, information-gathering, awareness-raising and strategic planning. Training programmes fall into two main areas: multilateral diplomacy and related disciplines on the one hand, and economic and social development on the other. Both areas have been continuously expanding and evolving since the beginning of UNITAR's restructuring process. The Institute uses diverse formats in the delivery of its training programmes. The fellowship programmes, for instance, are long-term, regular, and geographically fixed events. These provide a reliable platform for Member States and for the United Nations, and allow for the continuous fine-tuning and improvement of curricula. The more frequent training programmes offered by UNITAR are mid-term, intensive and geographically mobile, lighter in infrastructure, region-specific, proactive in approach, and aim to sensitize or train key target groups, prepare other trainers and design innovative training material and guidelines.

6. The international affairs management training programmes include two main fields:

(a) Activities in the field of multilateral diplomacy training are conducted in Geneva, New York and Vienna, using minimal operating costs. UNITAR plans to further enhance this programme through the publication and distribution of training packages which capitalize on past work and existing expertise.

(b) Fellowship programmes are being conducted or are under preparation on the following topics:

(i) United Nations/UNITAR Fellowship in International Law;

(ii) UNITAR/IPA Fellowship in Preventive Diplomacy and Peacemaking;

(iii) UNITAR Fellowship in Multilateral Diplomacy and International Affairs.

The fellowships in international law and in peacemaking and preventive diplomacy have been the main summer events in recent years. Both programmes have been attracting hundreds of nominations for a few dozen available fellowships.

7. In the areas of peaceful settlement of dispute and of international law, UNITAR's training activities over the last years have been compiled and submitted to the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs for inclusion in the report of the United Nations Decade of International Law. This document (A/51/278) will be discussed by the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly.

8. Activities in the field of economic and social development include three main areas:

(a) Environment and development: The effective implementation of policies in line with Agenda 21, sustainable development, implementation of international conventions and other legal instruments, environment/trade-related issues, environmental security, issues of great concern to both the United Nations and to Member States, will remain well into the twenty-first century. Undoubtedly, one of the most pertinent niches for UNITAR is its training and capacity-building work, complementary to the work of the lead agencies, to address the various chapters of Agenda 21 and the related conventions and agreements through training.

(b) The programme on external debt and financial management is evolving and expanding in order to meet the increasing needs. The programme has substantively widened its range to include training in issues related to the economics of financial management, debt and financial negotiations, international trade, and public administration. Geographically, the programme conducts concrete activities in three continents.

(c) The programme in disaster relief management has conducted workshops for decision makers in different Sahelian countries. This programme targets a rather broad spectrum of actors, from planners and decision makers to grass-root operations officials.

9. Among other particularly noteworthy achievements during the period under review was the organization of four major conferences which gave UNITAR the opportunity to demonstrate the relevance and impact of its activities:

(a) The Institute of Policies Studies (IPS) of Singapore and UNITAR initiated, in August 1994, a series of debriefing conferences on United Nations peacekeeping operations. The first conference, entitled "The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC): debriefing and lessons" had the particular merit of bringing together all the key actors involved in the peace process and the mission itself. The second conference, held in December 1995, focused on "The role and functions of civilian police in United Nations peacekeeping operations", and gathered nine of the 11 police commissioners of United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as policy makers, lawyers and academics.

(b) The Sixth UNITAR Conference on Heavy Crude and Tar Sands was held in Houston, Texas, in 1995. In addition to 160 technical papers and posters, the Conference featured a number of plenary sessions. The Conference was attended by 500 participants from 23 countries.

(c) AFRICAGIS'95 featured geographic information systems in support of sustainable management of natural resources in Africa. The purpose of the conference was to promote the development and use of geographic information systems (GIS), to encourage South-South and North-South dialogue, and to strengthen the communication networks between partners involved in GIS/Environmental Information Systems (EIS) in Africa. More than 375 participants from 35 African and 15 industrialized countries convened in Abidjan in March 1995.

(d) The international colloquium to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Court, jointly organized by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and UNITAR, in April 1996, was attended by eminent international lawyers and legal advisers from Member States. The topic of the colloquium was "Increasing the effectiveness of the Court".

10. Further to the decision of the Board of Trustees, the Institute's research programmes per se have been discontinued. Conversely, research on and for training, and development of training materials have recently been completed, as evidenced by some important developments: training packages, distance-learning material, workbooks with specifically designed software, video training materials, etc. Various books have been published during the period under review and a number of other manuscripts are at press for the months to come. These publications are relevant to training activities in the fields of international affairs, preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping operations. A cornerstone of UNITAR activities has been the design and publication of training

material to support and disseminate both the findings and resources of the programmes. They include educational and training series guidance documents and supportive documentation.

11. Special efforts have continued to be made, spontaneously and under the guidance of the Board of Trustees, to develop and strengthen inter-agency cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the secretariats of the United Nations environmental conventions. Cooperative links have been established or reinforced with national and regional training institutions, in particular in developing countries. Further to the wish of the Secretary-General and upon request of the Board of Trustees, a feasibility study (JIU/REP/96/2) was conducted by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) to consider ways of establishing a possible merge with the United Nations Staff College Project (UNSCP) to be established at the ILO Turin Centre. The conclusions and recommendations of the Board of Trustees on this item are outlined in Chapter V of the present report. In brief, the Board recognized the importance of the Secretary-General's initiatives in the field of rationalization of training programmes. However, it noted that a number of questions were raised regarding the possible benefits for UNITAR of any move outside Geneva.

12. On the financial side, the report of the United Nations Board of Auditors on the financial statement of UNITAR for the year ending 31 December 1995 (A/51/5/Add.4) reads: "Clear, achievable objectives had been established and met for the projects examined. Procedures for financial management and reporting of [the] projects could be enhanced by ensuring that funds are secured in advance". UNITAR receives no subsidies from the United Nations regular budget. Rather, it raises its own funds either through voluntary contributions to the General Fund or through the Special Purpose Grants (SPGs). For the fourth consecutive year the budget of the Institute remains solvent. To a great extent, UNITAR is achieving the goal set for it by Member States, namely that it should constitute a small multilateral and multi-disciplinary organ, autonomous and flexible, efficient in fulfilling precise and focused training missions. At the same time UNITAR remains fragile as ongoing budgetary cuts in many industrialized countries render UNITAR's fund-raising efforts ever more difficult. In any event, however, the Institute has demonstrated, during the restructuring phase, its ability to accomplish worthwhile, result-oriented programmes by optimizing and putting to best use the contributions available.